



PENINSULA FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC.

Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, Australia

NEWSLETTER: MARCH 2016

Rye 12th December 2015

For our last excursion for the year, after a few changes of plan, we were invited by our member Bett Mitchell to visit her in Rye, taking the opportunity to view the Striated Grasswrens that she commonly sees at the back beach – a sure thing she said.

As you might expect, the sure things were elsewhere on the day, so we set off along the beach where we did see quite a number of Hooded Plovers – at least seven. Several areas had been roped off where nests had been detected – there have also been trials of low shelters for protection from predatory birds. The Friends of the Hooded Plover do a great job in finding and protecting nests each year, as well as conducting information sessions for the public. The group welcomes new members and volunteers.

Other birds observed on our short walk included Australasian Gannet, Sooty Oystercatcher, Pacific and Silver Gulls, Caspian and Crested Terns, and a single Ruddy Turnstone on the rock platform. Bush birds included Brown Thornbill, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Singing Honeyeater and Silvereye.

Conspicuous on the beach were great numbers of Cuttlefish shells (or cuttle-bone) covered in gooseneck barnacles. Three species of these barnacles occur in southern waters: *Lepas anatifera*, *L. anserifera* and *L. australis*. The former have much longer stalks attaching the animal to its substrate, so it is likely that these belong to one of the latter species – the ridged plates suggest *L. anserifera*. (Anyone

with better knowledge is welcome to get in touch.)



Gooseneck barnacles. Photo – Lee Denis

Following our beach walk we had lunch in Bett's garden, where we saw as many birds coming in to her water dishes as we saw on the beach – these included Superb Fairywren; Spotted Pardalote; Brown Thornbill; Little Wattlebird; Yellow-faced Honeyeater; New Holland honeyeater; Grey Fantail; Red-browed Finch; European Goldfinch; Silvereye; Rufous Whistler and House Sparrow – hard to see why Bett would ever leave home!

A relaxing end to the year's activities – thanks to Bett for the hospitality - **Lee Denis**



Alison Walker

Over Christmas we lost one of our favourite members – Alison Walker.

In spite of Alison's advanced years (93) and failing health she maintained her enthusiasm and youthful spirit to the end. She was still going on excursions with us although she couldn't leave the car park, as she loved to be in the bush and out and about with the Nats. We loved having her along as she was always good company.

She was always a great contributor to the Club, doing stints as Secretary for 6 years from 1983 to 1989, and President from 1994 to 1996. The Walker family have hosted our committee meetings at their home for many years.

Her particular enthusiasm, among many, was for orchids. Another great love was golf, belonging to the "Millionaires' Golf Club" in Golf Links Rd. She worked with the grounds staff there to maintain the orchid patches, and we heard at her funeral that anyone who swung a golf club too close to the orchids would be warned!

Alison's best friend of 80 years was Margaret Grice, also a great contributor the Club as well as to Frankston Beach Association and the local history societies. She died only a few years ago and was very much missed by Alison.

Our thoughts are with Alison's family, particularly her son and our friend William. - **Judy Smart**

Reef Island 1st February

We were blessed with a fine sunny day with little wind for our trip to Reef Island, which is situated just off the eastern shore of Western Port Bay within sight of the San Remo bridge to Phillip Island (see our March 2014 newsletter for more information about the site).

Bird observations begin at the car park and continue over the walk of a kilometre or two to the natural causeway that gives access to the island at low tide. A few bush birds such as fairy-wrens and fantails, magpies and lapwings are seen on the way, as well as swans, ducks, cormorants and herons on the mud flats. Black-shouldered Kites over the paddocks and Australian Shelducks on the mud flats were notable sightings.

One of our group, Tanya, had been to the island recently and reported Singing Honeyeater and Grey-tailed Tattler having been sighted. The former was duly sighted in the mangroves, and the latter finally seen after almost circumnavigating the island. Pacific Golden Plovers, Red-necked Stints and Ruddy Turnstones were seen as they usually are at this time of year. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Curlew Sandpiper and Silvereye were also seen on the island. Little Grassbirds were heard in the undergrowth.



Grey-tailed Tattler. Photo – Tanya Hattingh

The bushes are festooned with the webs of beautifully decorated Jewel Spiders – a tricky proposition for photography even in a slight breeze.

Bird numbers are usually low, but 35 species for the day was a better than usual result. - **Lee Denis**

Bird List: Reef Island 1st February 2016

Black Swan	White-faced Heron	Grey-tailed Tattler	Masked Lapwing	Grey Fantail
Australian Shelduck	Great Egret	Ruddy Turnstone	Pacific Gull	Australian Magpie
Grey Teal	Australian White Ibis	Red-necked Stint	Silver Gull	Welcome Swallow
Chestnut Teal	Straw-necked Ibis	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Caspian Tern	Little Grassbird
Little Pied Cormorant	Royal Spoonbill	Curlew Sandpiper	Crested Tern	Silvereye
Pied Cormorant	Black-shouldered Kite	Pied Oystercatcher	Superb Fairy-wren	Common Blackbird
Australian Pelican	Swamp Harrier	Pacific Golden Plover	Singing Honeyeater	Common Starling

**Tanya Hattingh
Central Australia
10th February**

Our member Tanya presented her observations from living in Alice Springs. Tanya originally went to the Alice to attend their Beanie Festival (this has grown to be a big event celebrating hand-crafted beanies— see www.beaniefest.org). Tanya and her partner liked the area so much that they stayed there for a further four years – and plan to attend the next Beaniefest in June this year.

Spending that length of time there enabled Tanya to really get to know the area, especially the best birding spots. At the start of her talk Tanya asked how many in the room had been to Alice Springs – most had, and had been to some of the landmarks she mentioned. None of us had spent a long time there, however, so much of what Tanya had to tell us was new.

Tanya's main focus was birds, but she did cover some of the Central Australian landmarks – McDonnell Ranges, Finke River, Chambers Pillar.

Alice Springs was named after the wife of Charles Todd, who was responsible for the design and construction of a number of major telegraph lines in South Australia and Central Australia in the 1800s.

Tanya loved the township of Alice Springs and surrounding country and became interested in the local birds. Tanya's photos of Alice Springs township showed a mass of green trees due to lots of watering and depicted the colours of red and purple in the rock formations of the McDonnell Ranges.

Parallel ridges run through Alice Springs and the gaps in the ranges are interpreted by the Indigenous Aranda people as a caterpillar. Larapinta walking trail is here. We saw a photo of Heavitree Gap which was hollowed out by the Todd River, usually dry but in flood last year.

We saw red sand country in the Western part of the Simpson Desert. The Tanami Track is here. It starts 20 kilometers North of Alice Springs and was used by miners who walked it with barrows upon the discovery of gold.

Out past Ormiston Gorge on the Fink River, Tanya photographed Dusky Grass Wren, Brown Wren, and Grey Fronted Honeyeaters. They must like the Holly Grevillea.

Found at Temple Bar Caravan Park – 17 kilometres S.W. of town at Pultapunga were Pied Butcherbird, Port Lincoln Parrot, Yellow-throated Miner (looks like our Noisy Miner), Bower Bird, Red-tailed Black-cockatoo (male and female), and Major Mitchell Cockatoo,

The Desert Park – Tanya volunteered here and we saw the Bloodwood Tree at Olive Pink Gardens – Olive Pink was an anthropologist.

At the Sewage Treatment Plant, Tanya had permission to enter this area with about 10 lagoons, home to many migratory birds. Sighted were Brown Falcon, Black-shouldered Kite, Wedge-tailed Eagle and Western Bower Bird.

At Triphina Gorge in the East MacDonnells were Painted Finch, Diamond Dove, and Variegated Fairy Wren (with green features),

On the Rainbow Valley clay pans, Major Mitchells were eating Paddy Melon, a Peaceful Dove was calling the Weedy Buffel Grass habitat. Also seen were the White-winged Fairy-wren, Avocet and Spoonbill.

In Secondary Woodland were Mulga Parrots, Crested Bellbird, Red-backed Kingfisher, Cockatiels, the iconic Rainbow Bee Eater, Crimson Chat, Red-browed Pardalote with a red throat, Banded Whiteface, Chiming Wedgebill, and Chirruping Wedgebill. Tanya played recordings of the two Wedgebills so that we could hear their differing calls.

Tanya showed photos of Spinifex Pigeon, Grey-crowned Babbler, Black-faced Woodswallow, Budgerigars, Gouldian Finch, Black-breasted Buzzard (uses a rock as tool to break Emu eggs), Red-capped Robin, Black-chinned Honeyeater, Black Kite, Black-shouldered Kite, and flocks of 500 Zebra Finches. A Cinnamon Quail-thrush was photographed at Hendry Meteorite Crater.

Mammals included Black-footed Rock Wallaby, Wallaroo, and Western Quoll. Camouflaged in the red sand is the Thorny Devil (*Moloch horridus*), an ant-eating lizard which has a false head, and Perentie – a goanna which can be 2.5 metres long and weigh 20 kilos.

Tanya also showed photos of Central Australian Bearded Dragon, Bag Moth (Processional Caterpillar.) and Witchety Grub from the Cockerel Moth, a delicacy which is found eating the sap from the roots of the Witchetty Bush *Acacia kempeana*.

Roe Creek at Simpsons Gap is home to the Spencer Burrowing Frog which spends 6 months under ground in his skin cocoon.

Tanya showed wonderful photography of bird life, flora, fauna and reptiles observed in the vicinity of Alice Springs.
- Coralie Davies.

The Ada Tree 7th February

The Ada Tree had been on our to-do list for some years – this time we finally made it. The Ada Tree is a Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) which has an estimated age of 300 years, stands over 70 metres tall (or at least did once – the top seems to have been lost) and has a circumference of 15m at shoulder height. A boardwalk right around the base, and interpretive signage, add to the attraction.

Considerable effort has been made to provide a walking track through Ash and Myrtle Beech (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*) forest, with numerous tree ferns (rough and soft) and other ferns – quite dry like almost everywhere else at the moment. The walk through the gnarled old Ash and Beech trees, with a carpet of moss and occasional bracket fungi, provided quite a change from our usual Peninsula haunts.

From the Ada Tree we continued along the track to the New Federal Mill, of which very little remains – just a few pieces of steel really. It is common in many locations throughout the state forest that you can recognise former occupation sites, despite the absence of recognisable artefacts, by the remaining exotic plant species. So it is also at this location.

Birds were fairly scarce, with the most common being Grey Currawongs. Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos were also very conspicuous. Lyrebirds were heard but not seen.

There were great numbers of butterflies which all turned

out to be Striped Xenicas (*Oreixenica kershawi*, also called Kershaw's Brown). The larval food plants for this species are grasses, especially the Forest Wiregrass *Tetrarrhena juncea*, which was abundant along the walk.



Striped Xenica. Photo – Diane Peters

The drive to and from the Ada Tree, between Powelltown and Noojee, is in itself full of interest, with the last part on logging roads between towering Mountain Ash trees, with an understory including Bootlace Bush (*Pimelea axiflora*), a number of *Acacia* species, peas such as *Pultanaea daphnoides*, and numerous tree ferns. The reserve attracts a surprising number of visitors considering its rather remote location. - **Lee Denis**



Photo – Lee Denis

Birding at Karkarook Park 7th March

Karkarook Park, located on Warrigul Road, Moorabbin, is a wetland park that has been developed from a former sand-mining site. As late as 1997 the area was used as a retarding basin; and was virtually a wasteland covered with weeds. Then, Parks Victoria entered into an agreement with Boral and CSR to develop the area as public open space after extraction of sand. Sand extraction continued until 2001, after which the area was rehabilitated with the creation of wetlands, a lake, walking trails and extensive plantings. The lake was completed in 2004 – it is amazing to know that this park in its present form is only a dozen years old.

A list of nearly 40 bird species was a little surprising, and included not only waterbirds like Black Duck, Chestnut and Grey Teal, three species of Cormorant, Swans and Coots, but also numerous bush birds such as Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos, White-eared and White-plumed Honeyeaters, Little Corellas and great numbers of Superb Fairy-wrens.

After walking right around the lake we were surprised not to have seen any Grebes – this situation was remedied on a visit to some of the smaller ponds, where we also added Black-fronted Dotterel and Clamorous Reed-warbler.

We were also surprised not to see a single Ibis. Silver Gulls and Little Ravens were there in abundance, as were, not surprisingly, House Sparrows, Starlings, Mynahs, Blackbirds and Turtle-doves.



Black-fronted Dotterel. Photo – Lee Denis

The birds sighted were a mix of species you would expect to find in an urban environment – with the traffic roaring along the adjacent Warrigul Road – and some less expected, like the Black-cockatoos, Black-fronted Dotterel and the Wrens. - **Lee Denis**



View across the lake at Karkarook Park. Photo – Lee Denis

Bird List For Karkarook Park 7th March 2016

Black Swan	Great Cormorant	Silver Gull	Red Wattlebird	Little Raven
Australian Wood Duck	White-faced Heron	Spotted Turtle-Dove	Little Wattlebird	House Sparrow
Pacific Black Duck	Purple Swamphen	Crested Pigeon	Noisy Miner	Welcome Swallow
Grey Teal	Dusky Moorhen	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	White-eared Honeyeater	Clamorous Reed-Warbler
Chestnut Teal	Eurasian Coot	Galah	White-plumed Honeyeater	Common Blackbird
Hoary-headed Grebe	Black-fronted Dotterel	Little Corella	Magpie-Lark	Common Starling
Little Pied Cormorant	Masked Lapwing	Rainbow Lorikeet	Grey Butcherbird	Common Myna
Little Black Cormorant	Pacific Gull	Superb Fairy-wren	Australian Magpie	

Iceland – Volcanoes and Vikings – Land of Fire and Ice**Heather Ducat****9th March**

Heather and husband Robert visited Iceland for twelve days during June 2014, which was early summer, with an average top temperature of 10-14°. Iceland is 1000km west of Norway and 300km east of Greenland, just below the Arctic Circle. It is approx 550km wide, with a population of 310,000, two thirds living in the capital Reykjavik.

Iceland is only 25 million years old, and is situated on the mid-Atlantic Ridge, where the Eurasian and North American plates meet. Where plates push against each other they create mountains, such as the Himalayas or the NZ Alps. In Iceland the plates are pulling apart, creating a large crack which runs north – south through the middle of the island. This crack is many metres wide, and creates habitat for plants and birds. There are no trees, just grassland and alpine plants such as *Armeria* (thrift) and lupins.



Mid-Atlantic Ridge at Thingvellir. Photo – Heather Ducat

There are 370 species of birds, but no endemics. It is a stopover for migrants on their way north to the Arctic, and a meeting place for both North American and European birds. The Arctic tern for instance migrates from Antarctica to the Arctic each year. There are 20 species of duck, the most common being the Eider, of eiderdown fame. Farmers

collect the down to sell from their nests after they finish nesting.

The only indigenous animal is the Arctic fox, though reindeer and mink have been introduced. Iceland was settled in 874AD by Norse settlers, and the language today is Old Norse, not spoken anywhere else now (and not understood by modern Norwegians). It was an independent country for some time, and had one of the first democracies and parliaments in the world, the Althing, from 930AD. It was later ruled by the Norwegians and later the Danish, but has been an independent country since 1944.



Puffin. Photo – Heather Ducat

Heather was particularly keen to go to the North West corner of Iceland, where millions of birds nest every year,

the biggest breeding ground in Europe. For example – 100,000 fulmars, 250,000 razorbills, 400,000 guillemots and Heather's favourite – the puffins – 6 million nest in the cliffs from May to August and spend the rest of the year out at sea.

Another place of natural interest is Sturtsey Island, which has no public access, as it is a study in flora and fauna colonization. The island was only created in 1963 by a

volcanic eruption, and since then plants have washed in and fauna colonized.

Twelve days was barely enough to see Iceland, and they were unable to visit the central lava desert plateau, which has to be seen by four wheel drive tour. A fascinating and dramatic country. - **Judy Smart**



Snaefell Peninsula, Iceland. Photo – Heather Ducat

Werribee Park and Werribee Rver Park 19th March

All the omens were against us – heavy rain overnight with more rain forecast; massive traffic snarls on the Westgate due to roadworks, traffic expected to be heavy due to the Grand Prix, and several other events in Melbourne – so only the most optimistic turned out for this excursion. In the event the weather started out overcast, but after a brief shower at lunchtime the sun came out; traffic flowed freely on the Westgate, and a very enjoyable day was had at Werribee Park – or more particularly the gardens – and the nearby Werribee River Park.

Werribee Park encompasses the mansion built by the Chirnside brothers in the 1870s, together with farm buildings dating from the period, heritage gardens, a sculpture walk, and extensive grounds planted with a wide variety of conifers and broadleaf trees from around the

world, which were the point of interest to us.

There must be a dozen or more very large Bunya-bunya Pines (*Araucaria bidwillii*) – over 100 years old – as well as related Norfolk Island and Hoop Pines (*A. heterophylla* and *A. cunninghamii*). Other Australian trees include the Queensland Kauri, *Agathis robusta*, some very large Moreton Bay Figs (*Ficus macrophylla*), and many different Eucalypts, as well as several species of Brachychiton (*B. discolor*, *B. acerfolia*, and a very impressive Queensland Bottle Tree *B. rupestris*), and Silky Oaks (*Grevillea robusta*).

Non-Australian natives include a number of species of Cypress and Cedar, and pines including *Pinus halipensis* (Aleppo Pine), and the graceful Canary Island Pine (*P.*

canariensis) with its very long leaves. Several species of Oak, from Europe and North America, and many different Elms. Eight trees are listed on the National Trust Significant Trees Register (there may be more added recently) including an Ombu Tree (*Phytolacca dioica*), from South America, African Holly (*Cassine crocea*) and Bhutan Cypress (*Cupressus torulosa*).

The small lake contained a wealth of birdlife including a family of Australasian Grebes, with three juveniles still with their striped heads; at least three families of Coots with 3 or 4 chicks in various stages of development; a Little Pied Cormorant (is there a water body in Australia without a resident Little Pied Cormorant?); Black Ducks and Chestnut Teal, and Dusky Moorhens also with juveniles. The trees fringing the lake contained hundreds of Flying Foxes.



Eurasian Coot – showing its extraordinary feet.

Other birds sighted included Red-rumped Parrots, Red-browed Finches in the heritage orchard, many Willie Wagtails and Grey Fantails, and White-plumed

Honeyeaters. A Black Kite cruised along above the river valley.

Away from the cultivated garden the grounds extend down to the Werribee River, a wide floodplain comprising a River Red Gum woodland – some of the River Reds extremely large.

There is a connecting path between Werribee Park and Werribee River Park, but we chose to drive around to the latter – thankfully so at the end of the day because after a long walk along the river we would otherwise have had to walk all the way across Werribee Park to our car.



Werribee River from Werribee Park.

The Werribee River winds between high cliffs on either side of its deep valley. A newly developed walking trail extends south to the boundary of the Western Treatment Plant, a return walk of six or seven kilometres. From the trail at the top of the escarpment we were able to see on the river Herons, Pelicans, Egrets, Spoonbills, Crested Terns and numerous Cormorants, whilst overhead were Whistling Kites and a pair of Swamp Harriers – the latter calling loudly.

The walk is easy and affords wonderful views across the river valley. - **Lee Denis**

Bird List For Werribee 19th March 2016

Pacific Black Duck	Australian White Ibis	Eurasian Coot	Laughing Kookaburra	Australian Magpie
Chestnut Teal	Straw-necked Ibis	Masked Lapwing	Superb Fairy-wren	Little Raven
Australasian Grebe	Royal Spoonbill	Silver Gull	Red Wattlebird	House Sparrow
Little Pied Cormorant	Black Kite	Crested Tern	White-plumed Honeyeater	Red-browed Finch
Little Black Cormorant	Whistling Kite	Crested Pigeon	New Holland Honeyeater	Welcome Swallow
Australian Pelican	Swamp Harrier	Galah	Magpie-Lark	Common Blackbird
White-faced Heron	Purple Swamphen	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Grey Fantail	Common Starling
Great Egret	Dusky Moorhen	Red-rumped Parrot	Willie Wagtail	

Devilish Dragonflies

A trip to Devilbend's new carpark to access the east of the reservoir on a quiet, warm December day was, as a novice to the order Odonata, to explore how many species had made the reservoir their home.

To my surprise there were at least five species found around the edge of the water. These included two damselflies and three dragonflies. I could only identify the ones I photographed due to the difficulty separating similar species.

Identification of these insects can be very challenging for newcomers to this group of insects like myself. Initially I misunderstood the development of dragonflies and made the incorrect assumption that all the males and females were different in colour making them look like different species. One of these was the Blue Skimmer (*Orthetrum caledonicum*), which appeared to have the male resplendent in blue as the name implies, but I assumed that the yellow ones were female. How incorrect I was.

It turns out that most dragonflies emerge in their adult form as yellow insects, developing black marking over the first hour/s as they dry out. Only as the days pass do they develop their mature colour. For the Blue Skimmers, this involves the exudation of a chemical that turns them blue as it dries. It occurs over some time and means that they can have varying amounts of yellow remain with their pruinose blue coating.

The sexes need to be separated by looking at the end of the abdomen where the male has long pointed appendages for grasping the female, while the females are more blunt. I approached Reiner Richter who developed the online identification key for dragonflies [<http://rnr.id.au/cgi-bin/species/odonata>] for help with this species and he was very helpful in his response.

Other species can be very similar in appearance (especially considering the variation within species as they mature) but with small identifying features that clearly distinguish them from each other.

Two damselflies, the Common Bluetail (*Ischnura heterostica*) that has two blue spots on the rear of the head was superficially similar looking to the Eastern Billabongfly (*Austroagrion watsonia*), which has a blue strip across the back of the head and which I had seen shortly before this outing, at Bunyip SP.

The Odonata come in a wide range of colours, including blue, red, black, green and yellow with some of them needing a close approach to appreciate these colours, like the small Red & Blue Damsel (*Xanthagrion erythroneurum*).

Four of the species were seen mating and three I have seen

egg-laying. The Common Bluetail and Red & Blue Damsel both have the male clasping the female behind the head and both of them land as a joined pair on a stick or other plant material so that she can lower her abdomen into the water and lay the eggs.

In contrast to this technique, the Black-headed Perchers (*Diplacodes melanopsis*) fly joined in the same way (referred to as the 'tandem' position), but the male flies above the female and she tends to be flipped up and down as they fly. When she drops down, the tip of her abdomen hits the water and presumably she lays an egg each time it does. They are always on the move across the vegetated water where they lay their eggs.

A pair of Blue Skimmers was seen in the 'wagonwheel' position, which is when the male is passing his sperm (from the second abdominal segment) to storage sacs in the female, from which she fertilises her eggs at a later stage.



Blue Skimmers mating. Photo – Rog Standen

While many species perch on a range of plants, they are basically insect eaters so are probably not being choosy in what plants they use, apart from the opportunity it provides them to launch their next attack. Others, like the Blue-spotted Hawker, remain on the wing almost continually in their search for food and mates.

The full list of species seen and identified at Devilbend was: Blue Skimmer; Common Bluetail; Red & Blue Damsel; Blue-spotted Hawker (*Aeshna brevistyla*) and Black-headed Percher.

I have also spent time reading sections from Theischinger and Hawking's 'The Complete Guide to Dragonflies of Australia' gleaned much valuable information. - **Rog Standen**



Red & blue damsel



Common Bluetail



Black-faced percher female



Black-faced percher male

All Photos – Rog Standen

Correction

In our last newsletter, December 2015, the report on a trip to the Langwarrin Flora & Fauna Reserve mentioned the bladderwort growing in the reservoir there, identified as *Utricularia australis*. John Eichler, who spoke to the Club in November last year about his searches for rare plants, has informed us that the species is actually *U. gibba*. John wrote of his discovery of this species there – a new record for Victoria – in the Victorian Naturalist in April 2000 [Vol 117(2)].

Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month with a field trip the following Saturday. Further information and current Programme of Activities can be found at our website www.peninsulafieldnaturalists.org.au

President:
Mrs Pat Gomm

Treasurer:
Ms Linda Edwards

All correspondence to
Secretary
Mrs Judy Smart

Annual Subs due July

Adult	\$25
Concession	\$20

Newsletter edited by Lee Denis
